**QUEEN’S WOMEN GRADUATES’ ASSOCIATION**

**PRESIDENT’S REPORT - 6TH MARCH 2021**

**Summary**

2020 - what a year we will never forget. I have to admit, when my Presidency of Queen’s Women Graduates began in January 2020, I wasn’t prepared for the challenges we would experience.

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected each and every one of us, in some way. Since the initial lockdown in March 2020, we have been severely limited in our socialisation with family, friends and our communities. This was especially true of many of our own QWG members who are shielding.

**Annual General Meeting**

The AGM of QWGA took place on Saturday 25th January 2020 in the Canada Room at Queen’s University. The AGM ran on-time and included a charity book stall. Proceeds will go towards the Hegg Hoffet Fund.

The 2020 office bearers were appointed as follows:

President - Leighanne Montgomery,

Vice President - Clare-louise Wilkinson,

Secretary - Deirdre McCauley,

Treasurer - Carolyn Forester.

Following the AGM, our guest speaker Judith McAdam spoke of her approach to life. Judith runs a thriving practice in Dublin empowering women and men to tap into their unique creative intelligence and strengths. Her diary is booked up for months in advance. She is a feminist theologian, kinesiologist, inspirational speaker and life coach. Judith is also the author of the best-selling book ‘The Source’ written in response to the increasing demand for her one to one appointments and workshops.

**Public Speaking Final**

The final of the Public Speaking Competition was held on Saturday 7th March 2020 @ 2.00pm in the Belfield at UCD. The Public Speaking report will provide further information on the success of the 2020 final and the future plans for 2021.

**Covid-19 Restrictions on Events**

It became clear in March 2020 that the Covid-19 restrictions, at least in the short-term, would be significant. The immediate restrictions on movement and interactions meant that our events planned for April and May were swiftly postponed and it was with great sadness to postpone the Annual Dinner in particular. We held optimism that by the end of 2020, we may have the opportunity to host it again. Unfortunately that wasn’t the case.

We had a number of planned events in 2020 which has now been cancelled or postponed, these included:

* Tour of Crumlin Road Gaol
* QWGA Annual Dinner
* Networking Event and Evening of Discussion

During the year, QWG has worked closely with Queen’s University to understand and discuss the impact of Covid-19 on the university, specifically the alumni community. It was reassuring to be included in round table discussions with the Vice-Chancellor to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on Queen’s University in this current academic year, and also the projected impact in the forthcoming academic year, including alumni relations.

**Virtual Lecture by Dr. Moyra Hasslet**

There was one successful online event that took place on the 14th November 2020. Hosted by QWGA, we invited Dr. Moyra Hasslet to share paintings and art installations, rooted in her own research period, the 18th Century. The topic was “Claiming a place: group portraits of women''. The event was attended by QWG members and interested parties such as upcoming Queen’s graduates and students from Dr. Haslett’s lectures. It reassured many that online events are in fact *viable* and a method we should utilise more strongly to stay connected.

**Memberships**

As 2020 drew to a close, we had 60 QWGA members on record. A figure which has steadily been declining year-on-year. although I’m aware other associations are facing the same concerns and we are not alone.

QWG has been collaborating and learning with the IrFUW and GWISB groups to discover how we can better align and grow our associations. Time and time again, we have noted the common occurrence of memberships declining significantly with every passing year. We have highlighted common goals to revert this, and encourage each association to prosper. Graduate Women Scotland have begun a Young Members Group, in which they encourage members to connect online, discuss interests and encourage more ‘attractive’ talks, projects or networking. This will continue throughout 2021, continuing to share learnings. I am hopeful that we can convert the learnings into actionable and tangible changes to ensure our association is appropriate, impactful and growing.

**A look to the remainder of 2021**

With a speedy vaccine roll-out underway, I have cautious optimism that the Association will be able to once again, consider and plan in-person events. In the meantime, there are a number of opportunities to increase the connectivity of our members. We successfully hosted an online event in November and I believe with strong planning and the use of multiple online tools now available, we will be able to create an active, engaged and connected association for our members in 2021.

**Thank You**

On a personal note, this year has progressed swiftly. Understandably, QWG have been restricted on the types of events and socialisation we can have and many of our events were cancelled for the year with hopes that we would once again be able to host them, in person, in 2021. I especially looked forward to organising the QWG Annual Dinner in my Presidential year and I look forward with excitement to the time when we can all gather together! In my home life, I have pivoted my attention and responsibilities. Pre-covid, I worked significant work hours with a heavy career focus. Following the lockdown I was required to temporarily become a stay at home mum and wannabe teacher to my two step-kids while adapting to furlough life. A few months later, I was back to full-time work while maintaining the homeschooling when required - quite a year to remember! However, I am forever grateful and thankful that we continue to be safe and healthy.

As my year of president draws to a close, I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude, by saying it was both an honour and a privilege to be entrusted with the position of President. Although this year wasn’t as anyone would have imagined, I was delighted to have represented the association, it has been an absolute pleasure to have acted on your behalf.

Kind Regards,

Leighanne Montgomery

*President of Queen’s Women Graduates’ Association*